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CONTENTS.

<i>Benjamin Franklin: as Printer and Philosopher:</i> PRESIDENT CHARLES W. ELIOT.....	833
<i>An Empirical Study of College Entrance Examinations:</i> PROFESSOR EDWARD L. THORNDIKE	839
<i>Scientific Books:—</i> <i>Sherman's Methods of Organic Analysis:</i> DR. A. G. WOODMAN.....	845
<i>Scientific Journals and Articles.....</i>	846
<i>Societies and Academies:—</i> <i>Society for Experimental Biology and Medicine:</i> DR. WILLIAM J. GIES. <i>The American Chemical Society, New York Section:</i> DR. F. H. POUGH.....	846
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:—</i> <i>The Origin of the Small Sand Mounds in the Gulf Coast Country:</i> PROFESSOR J. A. UDDEN	849
<i>Special Articles:—</i> <i>Recent Earthquakes recorded at Albany, N. Y.:</i> DR. DAVID H. NEWLAND. <i>Paraphyses in the Genus Glomerella:</i> DR. JOHN L. SHELDON.....	851
<i>Current Notes on Meteorology:—</i> <i>Kite-flying over the Atlantic; Meteorologische Zeitschrift; Clean Air after Thunderstorm; Kite-flying at Barbados; Rain-making in the Yukon; Notes:</i> PROFESSOR R. DEC. WARD.....	852
<i>Botanical Notes:—</i> <i>An Alpine Botanical Laboratory:</i> PROFESSOR CHARLES E. BESSEY.....	853
<i>Royal Society Conversazione.....</i>	854
<i>The Mikkelsen Expedition to the Beaufort Sea</i>	856
<i>Mosquito Extermination:</i> PROFESSOR JOHN B. SMITH.....	857
<i>The American Association of Museums.....</i>	859
<i>The Ithaca Meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.....</i>	861
<i>Scientific Notes and News.....</i>	861
<i>University and Educational News.....</i>	864

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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN: AS PRINTER AND PHILOSOPHER.¹

THE facts about Franklin as a printer are simple and plain, but impressive. His father, respecting the boy's strong disinclination to become a tallow-chandler, selected the printer's trade for him, after giving him opportunities to see members of several different trades at their work, and considering the boy's own tastes and aptitudes. It was at twelve years of age that Franklin signed indentures as an apprentice to his older brother James, who was already an established printer. By the time he was seventeen years old he had mastered the trade in all its branches so completely that he could venture with hardly any money in his pocket first into New York and then into Philadelphia without a friend or acquaintance in either place, and yet succeed promptly in earning his living. He knew all departments of the business. He was a pressman as well as a compositor. He understood both newspaper and book work. There were at that time no such sharp subdivisions of labor and no such elaborate machinery as exist in the trade to-day, and Franklin could do with his own eyes and hands, long before he was of age, everything which the printer's art was then equal to. When the faithless Governor Keith caused Franklin to land in London without any resources whatever except his skill at his trade, the

¹Address before the meeting of the American Philosophical Society to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, April 20, 1906.